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UNCLAS SAN SALVADOR 003458

SIPDIS

DEPT PASS USTR FOR RPORTMAN

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: ETRD ES CAFTA

SUBJECT: EL SALVADOR: PRESIDENT SACA PUSHES FOR JANUARY 1

CAFTA

¶1. (U) During a December 9 conversation with the DCM, President Saca reiterated El Salvador's strong support for January 1 entry into force of CAFTA, even if El Salvador is the only country to qualify on that date. Saca promised that El Salvador would have all measures in place by the end of the current legislative session (which ends before Christmas). The US should agree to January 1 EIF for all countries that are ready, he argued; others could enter whenever they are ready. To delay CAFTA implementation, Saca stated, &would send a bad message to the enemies of free trade8 in the region. Saca added that the combination of CAFTA and NAFTA would mean that President Bush &would be half-way to his goal of a Free Trade Area of the Americas.⁸

¶2. (U)DCM noted that January 1 EIF could result in temporary loss of current textile accumulation benefits for El Salvador, should entry of other Central American countries be delayed. Saca responded that he understood the issue; El Salvador still wanted January 1 EIF. Issues such as temporary loss of textile benefits could be addressed separately.

Barclay